FROM THE ARMY ACQUISITION EXECUTIVE

Faster Fielding

I am pleased to see this issue devoted to the Army's continuing efforts to get technology out of the lab and into the field faster. The Army Materiel Command's (AMC's) new Research, Development and Engineering Command (RDECOM) is another innovative way that we are focusing on the needs of the soldier now—not a decade from now. AMC Commanding General Paul Kern, in this issue's lead article, highlights the objectives for establishing the new RDECOM, including the need to be agile enough to rapidly take advantage of opportunities no matter where they may arise.

As we continue to wage the war against terrorism, it is imperative that we continually take stock of how we can reduce the risk to our soldiers and, at the same time, make their jobs easier to perform. One good example is the Army's Rapid Equipping Force (REF) and its success in putting needed capabilities into the hands of our soldiers quickly. Once a field commander identifies an operational need, often to an REF member in theater, this small team goes to work to find an equipment solution. It may be government or commercial off-the-shelf or a near-term developmental item that can be rapidly made available.

The REF team has had several successes, particularly in Afghanistan. One such success that received high praise from soldiers in its original application is the PackBot, an unmanned ground vehicle that helps them successfully clear caves, bunkers, and compounds. After the need was identified, PackBot was fielded in just 27 days in the summer of 2002. Another example of fast fielding is the WellCam, a waterproof camera on a cable that is lowered into wells to locate weapons hidden there. It was literally configured on the spot once soldiers told the REF engineer on the ground of their suspicions. On the very first trial of the WellCam, the soldiers discovered a weapons cache packed in cosmoline or heavy grease to protect it from the elements. The rest is history.

There are other remarkable developments to solve common problems like communicating with local citizens in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency worked with private contractors to codevelop a phraselator that uses computer chips to translate English phrases into as many as 30 foreign languages. Users either speak into the device, which translates the English into the foreign language equivalent, or they can punch a button to call up the desired phrase. The phrases range from just a few dozen to as many as 3,500 phrases. Newer devices contain phraseology on refugee reunification and the search for weapons of mass destruction. The REF has also equipped teams far forward in Afghanistan with a less expensive personal PC with preprogrammed user-selected Pashtu phrases with outstanding results.

The successful application of teamwork and technology in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom marks a turning point in the way we wage war. The lessons we are learning are helping us prepare for future operations. Let me list a few of those lessons as outlined by Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld in a recent appearance before the Senate Appropriations Defense Subcommittee.

One lesson is that *speed* matters. Coalition forces pressed through southern Iraq in a matter of weeks, racing toward Baghdad. The enemy was unable to mount a coherent defense; use weapons of mass destruction; attack neighboring countries with Scud missiles; destroy oil wells; or blow up dams, bridges, and infrastructure—in part, we believe, because the coalition advance was so fast. This experience highlights the value of capabilities that can move quickly into theater and reach targets with speed and agility.

Another lesson is the importance of *intelligence* and the ability to act on that intelligence rapidly. In Iraq, using "Time Sensitive Targeting Cells," the coalition was able to launch attacks on enemy targets, in some cases within 20 minutes of receiving the intelligence information. Planes taking off for bombing runs at times did not receive their targeting information until they were in the air and well on their way. Ground forces were able to stay "in contact" with the enemy forces and attack them with great effect, even as those forces made every effort to avoid contact. The success of these efforts in Operation Iraqi Freedom validates our increased investments in command, control, communications, intelligence, and "persistent" surveillance.

Another lesson is the importance of *precision*. The capabilities employed in Iraq were discreet. One new weapon used for the first time in Iraq—a "thermobaric" Hellfire missile—can take out the first floor of a building without damaging the floors above. This weapon is also capable of reaching around corners, into niches, and behind walls to strike enemy forces hiding in caves, bunkers, and hardened multiroom complexes. It went from development to deployment in less than a year.

It is clear that we need to change to ensure that our soldiers will have the capabilities they need to accomplish their missions today and in the future—that is what the Army's transformation is all about, and that is what AMC's new RDECOM is all about.

Claude M. Bolton Jr.